

# MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

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## EDITORIAL

In previous issues I discussed the Walton case and appealed for someone to give me a coherent and convincing account of the case as a hoax. Many ufologists believe it to have been a hoax but they all base their arguments on what might have inspired it, possible motives and the results of polygraph tests. So far as I know, no one has given an explanation of how the hoax was devised and executed, and which characters in the story were involved in it and which were not. Most hoaxes are very simple and involve only one or two persons, but this is one of the most complicated and ingenious hoaxes I have ever heard of. As I have said before, the question is not why was it done, but how? Would someone like to take up the challenge?

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## SECRET SAUCERS

### Awkward question

An awkward question often put to proponents of the ETH is: If we have been subjected to visits by alien spacecraft for at least the past fifty years, why do we still have no convincing proof of their existence? The answer, of course, is that proof was obtained long ago but is being concealed by US government agencies. Many ETH proponents obviously do not believe this, but there are some, outside the lunatic fringe, who do.

Is there any rational basis for such a belief? The answer must be: No. It is one of the silliest notions among some very silly ones entertained by ufologists, and it is an unnecessary distraction from serious attempts to investigate unusual aerial phenomena. Although it has generated a vast literature, the cover-up theory simply cannot stand up to critical examination. I think it is time that it was disposed of and treated with the contempt it deserves.

### World picture

First, it should be noted that to hold this belief in a UFO cover-up requires one to have a very strange world-picture. This is centred on the USA. The rest of the world is its back yard. This means that if something important is kept secret in the USA, the rest of the world will either not know about it or will obligingly keep it secret also. If this seems too unlikely, then we must assume that the pilots of the flying saucers are under strict instructions to confine their activities to US territory, which is even more absurd and unlikely. This sort of problem doesn't worry American ufologists, as they tacitly assume that America can easily apply pressure on other governments to conceal UFO evidence. The US Air Force has recovery teams in constant readiness to retrieve the wreckage of crashed saucers from anywhere in the world without arousing the suspicions of anyone except ufologists and contributors to supermarket tabloids.

### Not quite credible

Some of the more thoughtful ETHers realise that this is somehow not quite credible, so they try to give the impression that physical proof of UFO reality becomes available only very rarely, and then only in the United States. An adept at this line of argument is Kevin Randle. In his book *A History of UFO Crashes* (1) he catalogues 85 reports of alleged UFO crashes, of which he labels two as 'authentic' and one as 'probably authentic'. Conveniently, these three events took place in the USA, thus eliminating the problem of hushing up crashed saucers in other parts of the world without attributing omniscience and omnipotence to the US government and its air force. Randle's findings thus neatly confirm the belief that saucers crash very rarely and only in the USA.

However, it is difficult to see how the secret has been kept in the USA for such a long time. Once more, Kevin Randle comes to the rescue. In his book *Conspiracy of Silence* he writes: 'In today's environment, the government no longer needs to hide the truth and engineer diversions. At some point, we began doing it ourselves and blaming the government for it.' (2) One way in which ufologists hide the truth and prevent everyone from learning the secret of the saucers is by failing to agree with Randle's interpretation of the Roswell incident of 1947.

Randle's approach is typical of the UFO believer. He insists that his is the correct interpretation and that ufologists who disagree with him are either dishonest or mistaken. Of course, the problem is that he has painted himself into a corner. As I have pointed out above, he has dismissed nearly all UFO crash stories as hoaxes because he knows that it would be impossible to maintain secrecy if there were too many of them. However, he is not prepared to go all the way and abandon the fantasy about saucer wreckage and aliens held at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, so it is necessary to arrive at a definitive version of the Roswell incident in order to give it credibility. The definitive version must be his version, of course.

### Unreliable witnesses

He has already demolished the stories of some of the witnesses, in the manner of sceptics such as Philip Klass and Kal Korff, but the ones he champions have been revealed as equally unreliable. For example, he continues to defend Frank Kaufmann despite the fact that Kaufmann radically changed his story and made it more dramatic. Initially, Kaufmann had claimed that a friend of his, a warrant officer named Robert Thomas, had told him that he was involved in some way with the retrieval of a crashed saucer north of Roswell. He later claimed that he himself was a member of the team sent to recover the wreckage and alien bodies.

As if this wasn't enough to discredit Kaufmann's testimony, Philip Klass established that in 1947 he was not serving in the US Army Air Force. He left the service in 1945 and was employed at Roswell as a civilian in the personnel department. (3) Thus it would be absurd to suppose that he would have been assigned to a team to recover a crashed saucer, balloon, aircraft or whatever.

### Nonsense

All the nonsense written about Roswell by ufologists is, as Philip Klass says, a cover-up. They are trying to cover up the fact that the wreckage retrieved from the ranch near Corona was merely a balloon rig, probably one of the Mogul experiments. This rather dull fact is not the sort of thing to sell books or gain standing ovations at those silly UFO conferences.

ETH proponents cannot accept that all their warnings about alien invasion over the years have come to nothing and that, after more than 50 years, it is obvious that the UFOs present no threat to the security of the United States or any other nation. As Martin Kottmeyer puts it:

Credit first where it is due. The Air Force got it right and told it straight. No material threat to national security existed. The invasion never took place. . . . The sense of urgency, the sense that it may be too late, the sense that our existence was dependent upon a correctly performed investigation was irrational fear. The Air Force repeatedly tried to get across the message that ufologists were wrong but they were in no mood to listen. It is dogma among ufologists that the Air Force was incompetent or worse, yet if that is accepted as a proper, measured evaluation, what word is proper to describe the body of thought presented by these ufologists? The Air Force did not perform flawlessly in the details, but they had the big picture in more than sufficient focus to understand it was a nuisance problem and not one of life and death significance. (4)

That just about sums it up. Let us hear no more about secret crashed saucers until someone can explain exactly how government agencies can keep secrets indefinitely about things over which they have absolutely no control. It is time for certain ufologists to grow up and leave the absurd government-secrecy angle to the hack writers and the lunatic fringe.

### References

1. Randle, Kevin D. *A History of UFO Crashes*, New York, Avon Books, 1995
2. Randle, Kevin D. *Conspiracy of Silence*, New York, Avon Books, 1997, 242
3. Klass, Philip J. *The Real Roswell Crashed-Saucer Coverup*, Amherst, New York, Prometheus Books, 1997, 198
4. Kottmeyer, Martin. 'Shams and Shepherds', *Magonia*, 46, June 1993, 11

## DISAPPEARING PLANES

There have been many UFO reports from aircraft, and there are a few cases in which the destruction or disappearance of aircraft have been attributed by some ufologists to encounters with UFOs. Two of the most interesting are the Kinross incident of 1953 and the disappearance of Frederick Valentich in 1978.

One of the main problems with the Kinross case is the confusion as to what did or did not happen. All that seems to be generally agreed is that, on the evening of 23 November 1953, an F-89C interceptor, piloted by Lt. Felix Moncla, with Lt. R.R. Wilson as radar observer, was sent on an intercept mission. It disappeared and no trace of it has ever been found.

According to Dr Menzel, the purpose of the mission was to identify an unknown aircraft observed on radar. The aircraft was identified as a Canadian C-47 airliner. The Air Force plane, on its way back to its base, crashed into Lake Michigan. The radar picked up a phantom echo near it. The two blips seemed to merge just before the aircraft disappeared. Menzel attributes this phantom blip to abnormal radar propagation, as '... the night had been a stormy one and atmospheric conditions had been conducive to abnormal returns'. (1)

Donald Keyhoe gives us a rather different story. He tells us that the jet was scrambled to check on a UFO flying over the Soo Locks (between Lake Huron and Lake Superior). The aircraft followed the UFO out over Lake Superior. The GCI controller saw the blips of the aircraft and the UFO suddenly merge and the combined blip went off the scope.

While the search was still going on, Truax Air Force Base sent an official release to Associated Press which stated: 'The plane was followed by radar until it merged with an object 70 miles off Keweenaw Point in upper Michigan.' This story was soon changed and the Air Force said that the radar operators had misread the scope and the object was actually a Canadian airliner that was off course.

The Canadian airlines denied that they had any flights in the area at the time, so eventually the Air Force changed its story and said that the aircraft was a Royal Canadian Air Force plane on a routine flight. When NICAP checked this with the RCAF they denied that there had been any such flight.

Air Force officers are said to have told two different stories to Lt. Moncla's widow. She was first told that the plane had been flying too low and had crashed into the lake. She was told by another officer that the plane had exploded at a high altitude. (2)

Attempts to obtain further details of this incident from the US Air Force have so far been unsuccessful.

Evidently, Menzel's assertion that the aircraft crashed into Lake Michigan is wrong, so one wonders about the accuracy of his accounts of other important cases. The generally agreed details of the case are very sketchy, so any theory as to what really happened can be little better than guesswork.

The Valentich disappearance is notable chiefly for the number of theories put forward to explain it, ranging from the plausible to the absurd. During his flight across the Bass Strait to King Island on 21 October 1978 he told air traffic control that he had encountered a mysterious object. He then reported engine trouble and, shortly afterwards, transmission ceased. No traces of him or his aircraft were ever found.

Of course, some ufologists believed that he and his aircraft had been spirited away by a saucer, but there were suspicious circumstances. He was interested in UFOs and had recently seen the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. He filed a flight plan but then left the airfield, for some unknown reason, for an hour, with the result that he would have to complete his journey in the dark, although he was not an experienced night flier. He failed to adjust his Search and Rescue time, until the controller urged him to do so. He also failed to call the airfield on King Island to arrange for the runway lights to be switched on.

Speculation has continued ever since this incident and includes the following: he became disoriented and lost control of the aircraft; engine failure; suicide; aircraft hit a net attached to a balloon towed by a boat used by drug smugglers (if caught, they would cut the balloon free so drugs would not be found in their boat); aircraft wrecked by military laser-beam weapon experiment; abduction by UFO. And so on.

Perhaps the true facts about these two cases will never be known, but concentration on the more mundane possible causes seems more likely to lead to the truth than unbridled speculation.

## References

1. Menzel, Donald H. and Boyd, Lyle G. *The World of Flying Saucers*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1963, 154
2. Keyhoe, Donald E. *Aliens from Space*, St Albans, Herts, Granada, 1975, 191-192

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## BOOK REVIEW

**J. Allen Hynek, Philip J. Imbrogno and Bob Pratt. *Night Siege: The Hudson Valley UFO Sightings*, St Paul, Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications, second edition, 1998. \$9.95, £7.99**

Formations of strange lights seen by thousands, over a period of years. Absurdly inadequate explanations offered by the authorities. What is going on? Are these sightings really mysterious or are we being conned by the authors of this book? It is worth taking a close look at this new edition of a work which seems not to have generated any intense excitement among ufologists when it first appeared.

A good example of the kind of sighting discussed in this book is as follows. On the evening of 12 July 1984, a police officer answered a call about a UFO in Bethel, Connecticut. 'When he arrived at the scene, a number of people were standing outside looking at the UFO, which he described as a circular pattern of lights that flashed red and blue and then green. It was almost directly overhead, no more than 500 feet in the air, and was about 300 feet across. It made no sound, and he could see a dark mass behind the lights that blocked out the stars.' When the policeman turned his spotlight on the object it projected a brilliant flash of white light on him and about ten other witnesses. The object then moved away to the north.

Most attempts to photograph these mysterious objects were unsuccessful, perhaps indicating that the lights were not nearly as bright as witnesses thought they were. However, during one of the more spectacular sightings, on 26 May 1987, a police officer managed to get a good photograph of the UFO which displayed a semi-circular pattern of very bright multicoloured lights. This object disrupted traffic on the highway Interstate 84 as motorists stopped to watch it. It was estimated that over 100 people saw the UFO that night.

As the authors investigated the reports, they found they could not avoid encountering the more bizarre incidents inevitably associated with UFO sightings. They are apologetic about this. To introduce the chapter called 'High Strangeness' they write: 'If you feel the reports discussed so far offend logic and common sense, you may wish to skip this chapter. We had mixed feelings about the following material ourselves and decided to include it only after lengthy debate.'

The authors found that some witnesses reported 'missing time' and strange dreams. To investigate these matters the authors, alas, allowed their witnesses to be subjected to the baneful influence of Budd Hopkins.

It is easy to use the alien-abduction stories to dismiss the Hudson Valley reports as fantasies and misidentifications of aircraft, but many of the sightings appear to have been genuine multi-witness ones, unlike many similar reports. We often read of spectacular UFOs which allegedly hover over busy roads, but are invisible except to the occupants of one car, but these appear to be different.

Attempts by the authorities to explain them away were usually unconvincing. One of the favourite explanations was that they were microlight aircraft flying in formation. How microlight aircraft can hover silently, in tight formation, on windy nights was not explained. As the authors put it: 'An ultralight is little more than a hang glider with a motor and a seat. It is illegal to fly ultralights after dark, and all of these sightings took place at night. Furthermore, ultralight experts told us it would be insane to fly one at night. We were also told that flying in tight formation with ultralights would be practically impossible.'

The Hudson Valley sightings certainly seem worth a second look by persons independent of the original investigators. Not all possibilities seem to have been considered. For instance, there is no mention of advertising planes, which cause so many spurious UFO reports in America.

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